

West Fork Red Canyon Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 12,970 acres

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA (ID-16-47) is located in Owyhee County about 100 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 12,970 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1).

Seventy-five percent of the WSA's 21-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads. The remainder of the WSA is bounded by legal subdivisions along nonfederal lands. WSA ID-16-45 lies to the west of West Fork Red Canyon WSA.

The WSA lies in juniper-covered rugged canyon country of Juniper Mountain's southern slopes. The WSA is flanked on its western and eastern peripheries by two long north-south ridgelines known as Bedstead Ridge and Big Tree Ridge. Big Tree Ridge is sandwiched between the East Fork Red Canyon Creek flowing south along the WSA's eastern boundary and the West Fork Red Canyon Creek which dissects the center of the WSA. The confluence of the two canyons is at the southern boundary of the WSA. Each of these canyons is 100 feet deep in their southern reaches and 300 feet deep in their northern reaches. Both canyons are V-shaped with steep, rhyolitic rock-rubbed slopes. Bedstead Ridge, along the WSA's western periphery, gives way to seven major parallel north-south ridgelines and drainages, including Petes Creek and Bear Creek. Bear Creek empties into the West Fork Red Canyon Creek while Petes Creek carves its own shallow wash across a broad, bowled basin (Bull Basin) occupying the south-central portion of the WSA, west of the West Fork Red Canyon. The upper elevations of Juniper Mountain on the WSA's western and northern peripheries are blanketed by a dense juniper woodland. As elevations decrease in a southerly direction toward the south-central periphery of the WSA, juniper becomes more thinly scattered and sagebrush/grass vegetation dominates the landscape.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

0 acres recommended for wilderness

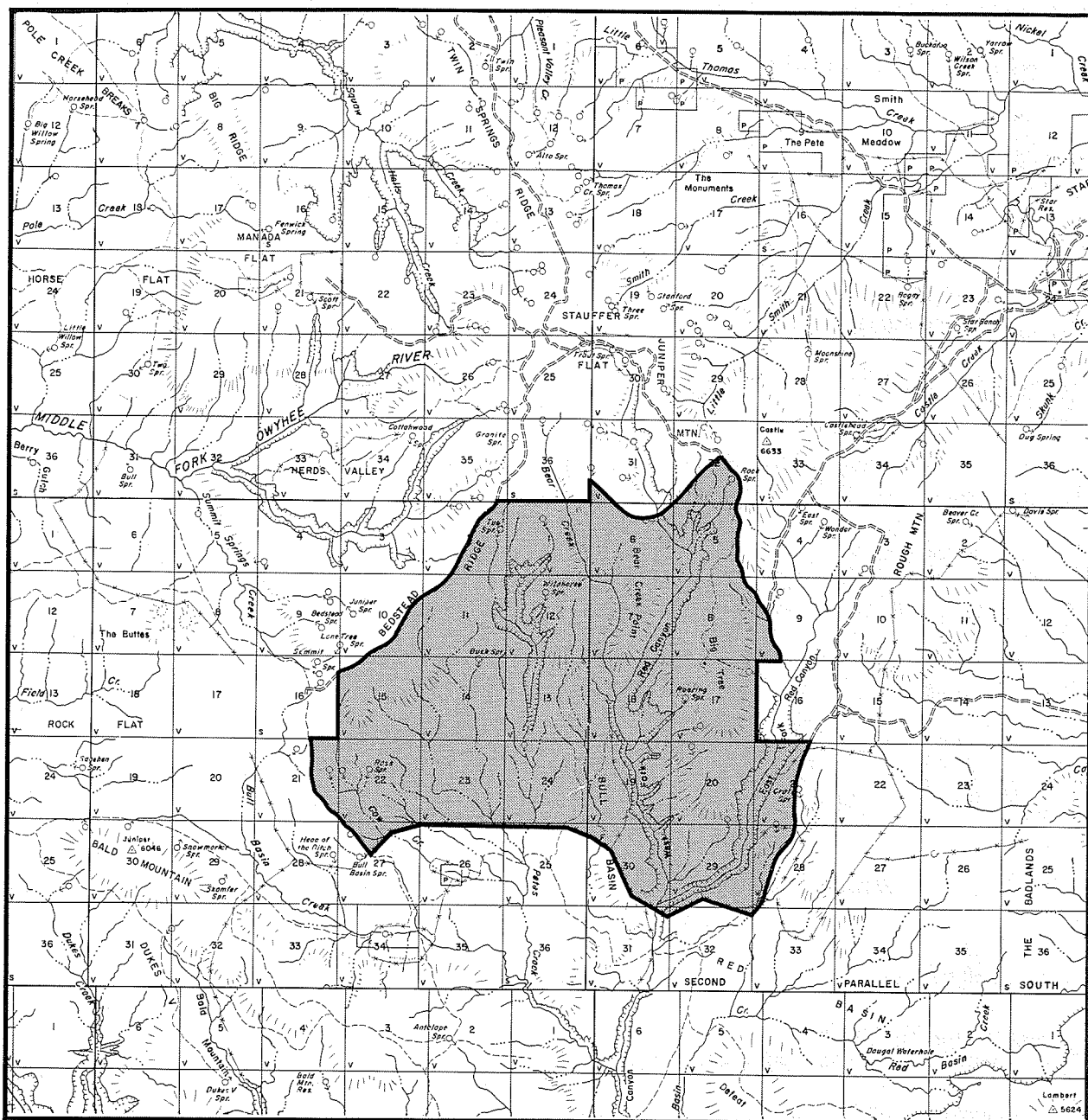
**12,970 acres recommended for
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the West Fork Red Canyon WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and to release the 12,970 acres for other uses (see West Fork Red Canyon Proposal map). The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.







In addition wilderness designation would reduce the flexibility necessary to improve the ecological condition of plant communities. Within the WSA, 2,600 acres would receive vegetation treatments, including tree cutting and/or prescribed burning, to control the encroachment of juniper into sagebrush-bunchgrass ecological sites. The amount of treatable land is relatively large and spread over much of the area. Therefore, conflicts with wilderness management cannot be mitigated by reasonable boundary adjustments.

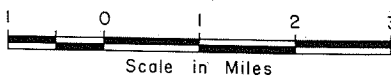
The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA is dependent upon restoring good ecological condition to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. In the WSA, wilderness management objectives would not be compatible with the vegetation treatment objectives.



R. 4 W. | R. 5 W.

R. 5 W. | R. 6 W.

- | | |
|---|--|
|  RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  SPLIT ESTATE |
|  RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |  STATE |
|  LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  PRIVATE |



ID-16-47
WEST FORK RED CANYON
PROPOSAL

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
WEST FORK RED CANYON WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	12,970
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	12,970

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	12,970
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	12,970
Inholdings (state, private)	0

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA consists of juniper-, sagebrush- and grass-covered hills and ridges separated by numerous drainages. The WSA is predominantly natural but there are several site-specific signs of man that impact the area including four miles of ways and 3.25 miles of fence.

B. Solitude

The WSA's rugged canyons, hills, rock outcrops and juniper forests provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. However, the opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The scenic natural features provide outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation including backpacking, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. However, there are no significant wildlife habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would attract a large number of visitors.

D. Special Features

There are no special features in the WSA.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of the West Fork Red Canyon WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2
Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
	<u>NEVADA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
	<u>CALIFORNIA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
	<u>OREGON</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

Table 3
**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

Manageability

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because its topography, rocky soils and trees are barriers to vehicle access except along established ways. These ways can be closed.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

An assessment of the mineral potential of the West Fork Red Canyon WSA was done under the Geology, Energy and Mineral contract.

There are no mining claims or known energy or mineral resources in the WSA. No leasing for oil and gas exploration has occurred.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation of nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative
WSA ID-16-47 (WEST FORK RED CANYON)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	10- to 20-year loss in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities, solitude and scenic quality from 2,600 acres of juniper treatment with recovery of values thereafter. Slight improvement in overall naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from range-land management actions. Solitude opportunities permanently reduced from use of recreation access roads and campgrounds. There would be 30 annual user days of primitive recreation use through 2005.	Slight decline in primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from juniper encroachment. Naturalness unaffected. Slight improvement in solitude opportunities from road construction and land acquisitions. Primitive recreation use would increase to 45 user days annually by 2005.
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 2,600 acres treated. An improvement in condition class would occur on 25% of low sagebrush-grass sites and on climax juniper sites. On untreated seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end;"> <div style="text-align: right;"> Poor Fair Good Excellent </div> <div style="text-align: right;"> 30% 44% 25% 1% </div> </div>	Ecological condition would improve on climax juniper communities. On interspersed seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end;"> <div style="text-align: right;"> Poor Fair Good Excellent </div> <div style="text-align: right;"> 45% 35% 20% 1% </div> </div>
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities	Juniper treatment would enhance habitat and increase deer populations while increased access would reduce populations. Net populations would remain unchanged. Other wildlife would also remain unchanged.	Juniper encroachment would reduce habitat and forage availability for mule deer while road closures would increase populations. There would be a net reduction of 5 deer. Other wildlife populations unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	Road building and campgrounds would increase public use thereby increasing vandalism and theft.	Wilderness designation would place constraints on study and management of cultural resources. Vehicle closures would lessen damage to sites.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	No road or way closures. The quality of hunting opportunities would improve slightly. Use would increase to 200 annual user days by 2005.	Closure of 4 miles of ways. Reduced deer numbers would slightly reduce hunting quality. Use would increase to 275 user days by 2005.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year on nontreated areas and .05-.15 tons/acre/year on treated areas.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .05-.10 tons/acre/year.

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Operations and Facilities (West Fork Red Canyon WSA)	Unrestricted vehicle use. Livestock use increased to 985 AUMs in 20 years. 3 new springs and .4 miles of fence would improve grazing system efficiency.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and livestock management activities. No new facility construction would limit grazing system efficiency. Livestock use would decrease to 915 AUMs.
Impact on Total Annual Revenues (West Fork Red Canyon WSA)	Revenues would be increased by approximately \$9,130.	Revenues will be reduced by approximately \$8,000.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Release of the entire West Fork Red Canyon WSA for nonwilderness uses would cause no significant local social and economic impacts.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of those, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fourteen commenters supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA and nine were against wilderness designation in general. The remaining commenters took no position regarding the West Fork Red Canyon WSA.

Those supporting wilderness stated that designation is needed to protect wilderness values and special features.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

- Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.
- There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.
- Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.
- Wilderness would limit access and prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training mission. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.